

REVIEW

CHISHOLM, R. M., *The Foundations of Knowing*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1982 (Cloth \$ 29.50, Paper \$ 10.95).

The Foundations of Knowing, Chisholm says, is “an attempt to deal positively and concretely with the fundamental questions of the theory of knowledge.” It is a collection of nine essays, and also includes a monograph of almost ninety pages which presents a sketch of the development of epistemology in the United States. The essays themselves are divided into two parts. The first four essays attempt to give a positive, and foundationalist, account of knowledge, and of these three are presented here for the first time. The last five essays satisfy Chisholm’s objective of dealing “concretely” with questions in epistemology: they are applications of the positive theory to specific problems. All these latter essays are reprinted from other sources, for the most part with revisions. Though one may well question the point of a book that is primarily a collection of articles that have appeared elsewhere, there is a certain value in having these essays brought together in one volume, particularly since the original publication of these pieces was so diverse, ranging from *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* to *Neue Hefte für Philosophie*. It is a worthwhile collection too, since Chisholm has revised and refined his theories over long periods of time: in this volume we have what can be taken to be the current Chisholmian epistemology (whether the monograph, not revised after its 1966 publication, contributes to this collection will be considered later). In any case, Chisholm has artfully organized these essays to present his epistemological position in clear, useful, and reasonably complete form.

The first essay, “A Version of Foundationalism,” presents Chisholm’s basic terminology and theory of epistemology. Chisholm accepts as a starting point the standard Moorean common sense beliefs about what we know: we are justified in believing certain things (which may be true or false), this epistemic justification is positively related to the truth of the belief, is a matter of degree, and so on. Chisholm explicitly sets out a gradation of “epistemic levels”, each of which reflects a degree of reasonableness that holding a belief may possess; a belief may have some presumption in its favor, be acceptable, be beyond reasonable doubt, be evident, or be certain. Though these levels can be applied to propositions, Chisholm holds that “the basic sense of believing is direct attribution” of properties, such that “I believe that p” means “I have the property of believing that p”, rather than “I accept the proposition that p”. Borrowing from Meinong, Chisholm says that certain epistemic properties are “self-presenting”, such that “if a person has (a self-presenting property) and also considers whether he has it, then *ipso facto* he will attribute it to himself”. And this self-attribution is certain for the attributor, in that it cannot be doubted. Examples of self-presenting properties are feeling sad or believing oneself to be wise – on consideration, one can attribute these properties (or their negations) to oneself with certainty: they are, in a sense, “self-justifying.” Here, then, is a case of epistemic justification that is foundational, that does not rely on prior justifications. Chisholm also holds that there are non-foundational

epistemic justifications of belief attributions with regard to such things as perceptual takings, which have a high epistemic level of credibility. These justifications can be based either on other, self-presenting, attributions, or on the coherence of the belief with other beliefs which are evident, or beyond reasonable doubt, or have some presumption in their favor. Chisholm, then, summarizes his version of foundationalism as follows :

... propositions that are indirectly evident ... are justified in three different ways. (1) They may be justified by certain relations that they bear to what is (self-presenting). (2) They may be justified by certain relations that they bear to *each other*. And (3) they may be justified *by their own nature* ...

Chisholm concludes his presentation of this account with a discussion of epistemic and non-epistemic justification, which he considers to be the point of demarcation between foundationalists and non-foundationalists. He criticizes the most common versions of non-epistemic justification of belief on two counts : (1) they are, for the most part, "programs to be worked out" rather than fullfledged theories, and (2) they do not provide a workable method for distinguishing knowledge from true belief that is not knowledge. Chisholm's criticisms here are not presented in enough detail to be compelling, but they do constitute a challenge to the non-foundationalist to develop criteria of knowledge which are as precise as Chisholm's own.

The second and third essays expand Chisholm's foundationalist epistemology. In "Confirmation and Concurrence", Chisholm revises his earlier theory of confirmation by distinguishing "absolute confirmation", which holds between two propositions such that if the first constitutes one's "total evidential basis" the second has some presumption in its favor, and "applied confirmation", which holds between two propositions if the first is evident for a given subject and there are no other propositions evident to that subject which disconfirm the second proposition. This distinction is made in recognition of the fact that most confirming propositions do not constitute a subject's total evidential basis. Chisholm then defines concurrence. A set of propositions are concurrent for a subject if and only if (1) their conjunction confirms the whole (ostensibly concurrent) set for the subject, and (2) each is confirmed for the subject by a basic proposition that does not confirm the other members of the set. Chisholm goes on to argue that "Any conjunction of concurrent propositions for S, each of which is epistemically acceptable for S, is beyond reasonable doubt for S". It is argued that this concurrence principle can be used to raise the epistemic level of propositions that merely have some presumption in their favor to that of being beyond reasonable doubt. The third essay, "Knowledge as Justified True Belief", defends the traditional definition of knowledge against attacks by E. L. Gettier and others, which show that there is evident true belief that is not knowledge. Chisholm's strategy is to draw a distinction between a proposition's being evident and its being justified : to do this, Chisholm introduces the notion of a "defectively evident" proposition, thereby allowing for the point made by Gettier that some evident true beliefs are not knowledge; given Chisholm's account, they are not knowledge either, but Chisholm's construction of the problem preserves the epistemic status of evidence in a way that defeats Gettier-type objections.

In "Knowing That One Knows", Chisholm attempts to give an account of what evidence one must have to know that one knows a proposition to be true.

It is Chisholm's position that "when one has evidence *e* that justifies one in believing something *p*, one does not have, outside of *e*, *additional* evidence that justifies one in believing that one is justified in believing *p*". To arrive at this view, Chisholm breaks down epistemic structure into (1) normative states, such as that expressed by "I am in a state such that *p* is beyond reasonable doubt for me", (2) objects of normative states (in this instance *p*), and (3) substrates of normative states, such as perceptual takings, on the basis of which I believe *p*. A higher order normative state ("I know that I know that *p*") has as its object a lower order normative state ("I know that *p*"). The key move for Chisholm is this: the substrate of the higher order normative state is *the same as* the substrate of the lower order normative state, so that whatever justifies my knowing that *p* also justifies my knowing *that I know* that *p*. So one does not have to be cognizant of epistemic principles in order to be justified in knowing that one knows; as Chisholm says, "If one is not an epistemologist, then *how* does one know that one knows?" The answer is: by knowing and by believing that one knows."

Unfortunately, Chisholm does not adequately justify the principle by which he arrives at this conclusion. In a very short appendix to this essay he defends these principles by merely saying that they are "simpler than any of the alternatives." But no discussion of the alternatives is undertaken, and it is not clear why simplicity *per se* should be a compelling reason for adopting his position. As is often pointed out in the philosophy of science, simplicity (or the principle of parsimony) is only one of many criteria of theory choice; Chisholm, however, has given us little else. This is a flaw throughout much of *The Foundations of Knowing*: we are given an epistemological theory without being given much in the way of persuasive argumentation for *why* this theory has, as Chisholm says, "no serious alternative". As another example, we can look at the notion of the self-presenting, which Chisholm defines in this way: "The mark of a self-presenting property is this: every property it entails is necessarily such that, if a person has it and also considers whether he has it, then *ipso facto* he will attribute it to himself." But this does not make clear precisely which psychological properties are self-presenting, or whether certain *types* of such properties are invariably self-presenting. For instance, I may in some cases believe something about myself, but on consideration be unwilling to attribute it to myself, and yet continue to act in a way that evinces my non-self-attributed belief. Chisholm's own examples are unhelpful here: 'I believe I am wise' may not be attributed to oneself, even if one in fact believes it, due to humility or a wise caution. The logic of self-attribution, and its attendant psychological constraints, is not as obvious or simple as Chisholm represents it, nor is his criterion of self-presentation descriptively precise enough to be useful in determining the actual range of self-presenting epistemically foundational properties. Similar cases can be found throughout this book in which no detailed justification of Chisholm's program is given. The one clear exception, "A Version of Foundationalism", does evaluate other positions — but attempts to deal with seven alternative theories in less than six pages. In a sense, then, Chisholm has given a thorough presentation of his foundationalism, but has said remarkably little about the foundations themselves.

In Part Two of *The Foundations of Knowing*, Chisholm applies his theory to specific problem areas in epistemology. This division is somewhat misleading,

however, in that the first two essays in this section, "The Problem of the Criterion" and "The Foundation of Empirical Statements", are not only better characterized as part of a theory of knowledge proper, they in fact clarify the position Chisholm presents in Part One. In "The Problem of the Criterion" Chisholm discusses possible strategies for developing a criterion of knowing that will avoid what may be the most serious problem for a foundationalist epistemology: how to formulate criteria of knowledge that do not create a vicious circle. We can, says Chisholm, either (A) try to proceed from enumerating the kinds of things we do know to determining what criteria of knowledge are implicit in this enumeration, or (B) we can formulate criteria and then apply them to determine what we know. But it is not clear that we can either say what we do know or formulate criteria of knowledge without first being able to do the other as well. How do we get out of this dilemma? Chisholm appeals to the notion of the self-presenting, which requires no justification, and hence is not subject to criteria, as a way to initiate strategy (A). He then says that "the theory of evidence ... presupposes an objective right and wrong", a notion of "epistemic preferability", from which criteria of knowledge can be derived. Though Chisholm's development here is brief, it is clear that these criteria would be formulated in terms of his "epistemic levels" as presented in Part One. In "The Foundation of Empirical Statements", Chisholm extends and refines the notion of criteria in order to find rules for determining the foundation, or justification of, statements in empirical science. He argues that the criteria of belief in a statement A should be that (1) A is preferable to its alternative(s), (2) A is evident, acceptable, or probable given other accepted statements, (3) A is confirmed by evidence, and (4) it is rational that we believe A. The basic statements that meet these criteria are precisely those for which the question "What justifies your believing A?" does not generate either a vicious circle or an infinite regress; given the account in Part One, these will not be perceptual statements, but rather "certain psychological statements about oneself" such as "I seem to remember having seen that man before" or "That looks green". These "subjective" basic statements can be "objectified" by the formulation of rules of evidence which would confirm non-evident statements by appeal to evident, "subjective", statements.

The three remaining essays do apply Chisholm's theory to specific problems. "*Verstehen*: The Epistemological Question" considers the possible existence of intuitive understanding as a necessary condition of knowledge of other minds. Chisholm argues for this understanding on the grounds that neither induction, deduction, nor self-presentation will justify the existence of external objects from directly evident premisses; that we do have justified beliefs about these objects suggests that a third faculty (*Verstehen*) is the source of these beliefs, and is a source of epistemic justification. In "What is a Transcendental Argument?" Chisholm argues against the efficacy of transcendental arguments in solving "the traditional problems of the theory of knowledge." According to Chisholm, the very form of any transcendental argument requires acceptance of both certain "preanalytic data" and of a "transcendental premiss" which asserts that if the preanalytic data are accepted then, necessarily, that which is to be proven is true. But it is this latter premiss which the sceptic is not bound to accept, and which is likely to be provable itself only given the solution to at least some of the "traditional problems" which the sceptic is

invoking. Thus transcendental arguments need not be compelling, if the sceptical interlocutor rejects the transcendental premiss itself. The final essay, "The Paradox of Analysis: A Solution", written with Richard Potter, attempts to answer the questions, "In an analysis, if the analysans and the analysandum are logically equivalent, then how is it possible for the analysans to be conceptually richer than the analysandum? How can this analysis extend our knowledge? And how is it that the analysis is not circular?" Chisholm and Potter suggest that the paradox of analysis is not a problem about language, but rather about properties, and they deploy "an intentionally oriented theory of properties" which reinterprets, and thereby purportedly solves, the problem. Though their analysis is related to the theory of Part One, it is closer in spirit and terminology to that presented in Chisholm's *The First Person: An Essay On Reference and Intentionality* (Minnesota, 1981), and seems not directly relevant to the topics treated in this volume.

Part Three is a lengthy monograph, "Theory of Knowledge in America", which was first published in 1966. It is reprinted here without revision. Just why this piece is included is not clear: given Chisholm's extensive revisions of his position, it does not fit what I take to be the major purpose of this collection, which is to give a presentation of Chisholm's current views. One would think that this purpose might be better served by omitting this monograph and lengthening several of the earlier essays to give more extended criticisms of the views of Chisholm's opponents. These reservations aside, "Theory of Knowledge in America" is still a worthwhile piece of work. It is problem-centered rather than chronological, dealing in large part with four recurrent problem areas in American epistemology: scepticism, the "Myth of the Given", reason and the *a priori*, and the relation of knowledge and appearance. The virtue of this structure is that it provides useful surveys of the dialectic of certain philosophical questions, a particularly good result given the notorious reappearance of the same or similar controversies in philosophy. Chisholm does not restrict his discussion to American philosophers, but also includes comment on such philosophers as Aquinas, Nicholas of Cusa, and others whose views are relevant to the problems here discussed. This is typical of Chisholm, since one of his many virtues as a philosopher is a rich and informed awareness of the history of philosophy and its relevance to contemporary problems. The difficulty inherent in this problem-oriented structure is that it suffers from a lack of historical organization: there is no sense of how these problems evolved, or of what progress (if any) has been made toward their solution. The fourth section, on knowledge and appearance, is something of an exception, dealing systematically with the New Realists, Critical Realists, and John Dewey in a more or less historical setting. Finally, it is an interesting historical point that in this essay, written in 1966, Chisholm issues promissory notes for the discussion of the problems of confirmation and criteria, which he honors in the first two parts of the present volume.

The Foundations of Knowing, then, is a useful collection of essays by a major American philosopher. It is clearly essential for students of Chisholmian epistemology, and would be stimulating and worthwhile reading for most philosophers, given the broad range of topics it covers, both in epistemology proper and in related areas. It is the case, though, that not a great deal of new ground is covered here. The theory in Part One was, as Chisholm himself says,

“defended in detail” in *The First Person : An Essay On Reference and Intentionality*, which in this reviewer’s opinion is a much more important work. Leaving aside the long monograph, we are left with a sequence of essays which provide clarification and applications of this theory : this is certainly not without value, and in some ways a clearer picture of Chisholm’s epistemology is conveyed by these essays than by *The First Person*, which has other goals besides simply setting out a theory of knowledge. For the reader who is unfamiliar with Chisholm’s work, however, a better introduction would be *The Theory of Knowledge* (Prentice-Hall, 1977), which presents in a simpler form a position which is roughly that which Chisholm presents in *The Foundations of Knowing* (and *The Theory of Knowledge* is considerably cheaper).

Finally, I would be remiss not to mention a serious imperfection in the production of this book, namely, the excessive number of typographical errors which eluded the editors. Some are only mildly annoying, but there are a substantial number of cases in which words are misspelled or left out entirely, often in such a way that the meaning of the sentence is unclear. Often these problems are removed by a consideration of context, but surely the reader should not have to correct a problem which could have been avoided by conscientious proofreading of the text before publication. This is all the more regrettable given the admirable precision and lucidity of Chisholm’s prose style, which is disrupted by the needless flaws in this book’s production.

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